

Christian Education in the Home

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Since 1935 there has been increasing interest in Christian education in the home. In 1936 the International Council of Religious Education published Bulletin 422 on *Home and Church Sharing in Christian Education*, a conference being held at Lake Geneva that same year to consider the problem. In 1938 the Council created a commission on Christian Family Life and in 1943 the observance of Christian Family Week was instituted. A National Council on Family Life was held in the White House in Washington, D. C. in 1948, which although not essentially religious in character provided the International Council with authoritative information on a national scale. In 1945 a full time director of Adult Work and Family Education was appointed by the Council.¹

The rapid development of a complex heterogeneous society with individualism superseding family life and influence projects a problem which is both sociological and religious. It is a regrettable fact that when Protestantism needed a strong, united front to meet these devastating changes, it presented a largely sterile and declining program of education, stripped of supernaturalism. There was steady and marked decline in religious activity and interest, almost to the point of futility. Religious education had been concerning itself largely with social abstractions rather than the tendencies of the human heart out of which spring the issues of life.

The basic threat to western civilization is in the increasing ratio of divorce to marriage. This has forced the rethinking of religious education in terms other than international, racial and religious unity as the central problem of Christianity.

The church is faced with the question, What can be done religiously in a culture

the basic pattern of which is a thoroughgoing secularism?

Instead of the wholesome and stable family life of yesterday influencing society there is now the disintegrating family in which, as Wesner Fallaw says, so elemental a family matter as the common meal has been superseded by the appeal of eating out. "Set down in an urban civilization in which many or most of the decisions for living are made without regard to the moral law or a personal God, the family, like society tends to be thoroughly secular."²

The old fashioned farm family home which largely shaped the idealism of this country was characterized by community of interest, common family traditions, family loyalties and a sense of enduring values. The desperate need of the modern home is common vital interests which challenge and integrate its members. In this highly individualistic day religion affords opportunity for integration of the members of the family in a common cause and fellowship. The problem is how to reach the modern home and make it truly religious.

The problem of Christian education in the home is further complicated by the fact that it includes both the families which are within the orbit of the church's life and those whose interests are entirely secular.

For the family which is already nominally within the life of the church there is the problem of the hallowing of life. In the full glow of great revival movements the routine of daily life was permeated with religion. Private devotions or "secret prayer" was incumbent upon every Christian. Family worship was observed in many homes three times a day. Grace was said, and sometimes sung as well before every meal, and often thanks was offered after

¹Bower and Hayward, *Protestantism Faces Its Educational Task Together*, p. 144.

²P. H. Salz, Editor, *Orientation in Religious Education*, Fallaw, Wesner, "The Home and Parent Education", pp. 236-237.

each meal. Mothers accepted it as a responsibility to teach their young to pray. They told them stories from the Bible and conversed with them concerning the meaning of the stories and their relation to life. Religious hymns were sung by the family on Sunday afternoons as a matter of recreation. Religious respectability involved attendance upon "protracted meetings" extending over a month or so each year as well as Sunday school, morning and evening worship services and mid-week service. There was also the camp-meeting antedating the modern family camp. Just as the mediaeval cathedral dominated the country side architecturally so the old fashioned evangelical church in the community loomed spiritually in the midst of its families.

How can the modern family be induced to have family prayer once each day, to say grace at the table and to teach prayers to the children—a religious minimum for a Christian home?

The problem immediately suggests the necessity of personal regeneration on the part of the parents. The most effectual agency for the evangelization of adults has been the revival meeting with its emphasis upon home visitation, lay evangelism, personal work, Bible study and prayer, the insistent proclamation of the Christian Gospel and the Christian ethic. It has been suggested that parental care for children must be depended upon as the ground of motivation. That such is not adequate is self-evident. There is need of a supernatural work among our people.

Homes are but the social pattern in microcosm. If the furnishings and activities of the home include cocktail shakers, ash trays, games peculiarly popular in night spots and unsavory centers, books which are both pornographic and profane, magazines which cater to sex in a negative way, music which is "hot", television, radio and movie shows which are anything but religious and moral, it is obvious that secularism, not Christianity, rules the place. If, on the other hand, there are prominent in the home church bulletins, Christian periodicals, Christian objects of art, Bibles and Testaments, books of proven value culturally and moral-

ly, periodicals which cater to the home and respectability, selected radio and television programs, the church calendar, church school materials, Scripture wall plaques, Christian music, it is obvious that religion, not secularism, dominates the home.

Since secular choices are so much a matter of desire, based upon the love of the world and the things which are in the world, evangelism of parents is the basic need in a program of religious education in the home.

Another consideration is religious literacy. It has been said that the low intellectual and moral tide of the 17th and 18th centuries was due to the failure of Protestantism in its teaching program. It cannot be said that Protestantism since the 18th century has been overdoing teaching. Twenty-five hours per year of class room activity puts religion at a very great disadvantage in relation to secular education in America. For a life trying to find its way in an era of overwhelming secularism the odds are very great. Classes for parents, Bible study groups, missionary activities, radio programs, church services and the various activities in organized religious education, and an abundant literature have helped to protect the life struggling against secularism. But these do not take the place of religious education in the home. Parents need to know forms of prayer for their little ones, and for themselves. They should be able to teach children's hymns, to select portions of Scripture for family worship, to tell Bible stories and converse about religious matters. They should know how to procure the best in children's literature; Christian art; radio and television programs; projected pictures; the church year with its special days; the Christian observance of birthdays, holidays, commencement occasions, special occasions for thanksgiving, in the home. They should be able to present the claims of Christ to their own children.

One of the characteristics of the Christian home is its Christ centered social life. Guests and callers have to do with education in the home. The presence of the pastor, or missionaries, of youth leaders, of

the director of Christian education, of friends from Christian homes make of social life a sacrament.

The matter of a curriculum for church and home has been receiving attention. The Presbyterian Church U. S. A. has pioneered in the field, with other denominations such as the Evangelical-United Brethren following suit.³ Ernest Ligon requires the participation of the parents in his character training program in religious education.

The Committee of Sixty for which Vieth reports suggests a program of religious education for the home including: 1. Interesting home work with appeal to parents for cooperation; 2. Help on family worship; 3. Practical suggestions for the observance of special days; 4. Lists of materials for home reading; 5. Lists of pictures with interpretation; 6. Guidance in the use of music; 7. Bulletins on programs and community events; 8. Helps for home fellowship (recreation, etc. on cooperative basis); and 9. Helps to parents on the rearing of children.⁴

Parental interest in children will provide a measure of motivation in such a program as has been outlined. Parental concern is a powerful incentive, so strong that it bore everything before it in the battles to establish an American system of free public schools. But if the vision of parents does not include religion, if their hearts' attitudes are secular, how can their parental concern include religion? In these materialistic days Christianity is not offering jobs or enlarged opportunity by reason of education. Nor is there social stigma attached to being a religious illiterate. Christianity offers a way of life and eternal life.

³*Christian Faith and Life*, A Program for Church and Home, Board, Christian Education of The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

⁴Paul Vieth, *The Church and Christian Education*, pp. 188- 189.

One can understand how secularist motives such as better opportunity for a livelihood, social recognition, etc. might prompt parents in cooperative educational enterprises. On the other hand, Christianity involves a miracle in each life. There must be a passion to bring parents to a saving knowledge of Christ that their interests and desires may be changed, meanwhile every worthy method should be employed to secure the interest and cooperation of parents in a program of Christian education in the home.

Religious education must recapture some lost values and techniques. The family camping movement gives promise. It was in the days of the family camp, the camp meeting, that many children and young people were saved. Perhaps the restoration of the camp-meeting with an emphasis upon classes for all the members of the family might constitute an appeal to the unchurched family. However, unsaved families are not likely to form a part of the camp-meeting community.

Summarizing, the primary need is for Christian parents, and secondly, religious literacy is a vital need. The problem is largely one of motivation which for the evangelical means that there is little hope for the Christianization of the home apart from the regeneration of parents.

Any program of religious education in the home which induces people to say prayers and to teach their children to pray deserves encouragement. But to secure sufficient interest in religion to make that possible is more than a mere human "selling" activity. It involves supernatural guidance and help.

The power of example necessitates right attitudes. Children in the home deserve to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of their parents.